

Peter Smith (2)

The Importance of just Sentiments of God,

CONSIDERED IN

A SERMON,

Preached at PLYMOUTH, JULY 1, 1795,

BEFORE THE SOCIETY OF

UNITARIAN CHRISTIANS,

ESTABLISHED IN

THE WEST OF ENGLAND,

FOR

PROMOTING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE

AND THE

PRACTICE OF VIRTUE

BY THE

DISTRIBUTION OF BOOKS.

By THOMAS BROADHURST.

God is a Spirit : and they that worship him must worship him in spirit
and in truth. JESUS.

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A SERMON.

ACTS xvii. 29.

FORASMUCH THEN AS WE ARE THE OFFSPRING OF GOD,
WE OUGHT NOT TO THINK THAT THE GODHEAD IS
LIKE UNTO GOLD, OR SILVER, OR STONE, GRAVEN BY
ART AND MAN's DEVICE.

IN the course of his travels, as a preacher of christianity, the apostle Paul arrived at the renowned city of Athens. It is not unreasonable to suppose, that, agreeably to the well known character of its inhabitants, he found them polite, learned, ingenious, and philosophic. But he found them a people deeply immersed in idolatry. Notwithstanding their skill in the arts and sciences, their religious knowledge, like the rest of the heathen world, was irrational and superstitious. The great and enlightened mind of the apostle was moved within him, when he contemplated their deplorable state. He, accordingly, reasoned with them upon the subject, and stated to them, upon various occasions, the impropriety and iniquity of their religious services. And even the pride of Athenian philosophy stooped to converse with this learned and illustrious teacher of divine truth. So much indeed was the curiosity of the people excited by his conversation, and probably by his

fame also, that they took him before the Areopagus, the most grave and dignified seat of judicature, at Athens; where he delivered a most sublime and eloquent discourse respecting their idolatrous state, the nature of the deity, and the resurrection of the dead. In the course of this solemn address, he advances the noblest sentiments of the divinity, and urges them to refrain from the worship of idols. By a quotation, from one of their poets, he proves that they acknowledged themselves the offspring of God; and thence concludes, that as it becomes children to think respectfully of their parents, so they ought to entertain the most worthy conceptions of their heavenly Father. *Forasmuch (says he) as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.*

As no sentiment can be of greater importance than this, and as it is a principal object of the society, which I have the honor of addressing, to inculcate right notions of the supreme Being, in opposition to those corrupt and false sentiments on this head which prevail in the christian world, I trust, we shall not be spending our time altogether unprofitably, in making it the subject of our present meditations. I, therefore, solicit your attention, while I endeavour to shew what sentiments it becomes us, as the offspring of God, and as christians, to entertain of the supreme Being; the importance of such sentiments; and the method by which to acquire them.

Our sentiments of God, my christian brethren, ought to be the most rational and exalted which the human mind can form. We should, accordingly, regard him, as without beginning and without end; as subject to no variableness or change whatever; as *dwelling, not in temples made with*

with hands*, nor in any particular place ; but as occupying every part of infinite space, and every where present, at one and the same time. We should contemplate him, as possessing all possible knowledge ; as perfectly acquainted with all circumstances, past, present, and to come ; as searching the hearts, and knowing the thoughts of the children of men† ; as the first cause and maker of all things, visible and invisible ; as the sole director and governor of the universe ; and as having the entire superintendance of every event which takes place in the world which we inhabit. We should ascribe to him all possible power, and look upon him as capable of effecting, in a single instant, whatever designs his all knowing mind hath formed.

With respect to his moral attributes, we should conceive of him as supremely and impartially good ; as holy, without the least blemish ; as gracious and merciful, from his very nature ; as just, without severity ; true, without variation ; and faithful to his promises in the highest degree. Whatever is great, and adorable, and lovely, and good, we should consider as dwelling in him : whatever is imperfect, or weak, we should discard from our apprehensions of him. We should stretch our understandings to the utmost, and elevate our ideas to the summit of excellence, when we make the God of heaven and earth the subject of our meditations ; for we have no reason to fear lest our conceptions of him should be too sublime. This is absolutely impossible. The only thing we have to fear is, lest our conceptions should not be sufficiently worthy of him. To sum up the whole : we should regard the divinity as infinite in all perfections ; as eternal, and everlasting ;

* Acts xvii. 24.

† 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent; as unbounded in goodness, and unlimited in every moral excellence.

It must be allowed, that the human faculties appear extremely feeble and confined, when exerted upon so grand and exalted a subject as the divine nature. Hence it may be objected, that finite creatures can never comprehend what is infinite; and, therefore, that the human mind can have no ideas whatever of the Deity. But this objection, if carried to its utmost length, would lead us to conclude, that we are incapable of knowing any thing at all. For we are very little acquainted with the most common objects we see around us, as far as relates to their essential nature and differences; yet we doubt not their existence. We know not what constitutes the power of thought and volition within us; by what particular means we move our limbs, or what is the true nature of the vital principle; yet we are conscious that we think, and will, and move, and exist. We never entertain the least doubt of these effects, though we are quite ignorant of the immediate causes by which they are produced. The case is similar with regard to our notions of God. Though we can never, and shall, probably, in no future stage of our existence, be able perfectly to understand, in what manner he is eternal and omnipresent, all powerful and omniscient, yet we are obliged to infer, both from the dictates of reason, as well as from revelation, that he is so. It is, therefore, a mark of humility deserving of censure, when we reject the knowledge of God entirely, because he has not permitted us to obtain an adequate comprehension of him. This it would be arrogance to expect; so that it is more becoming creatures dependant and imperfect, as we are, to bend our knees in fervent gratitude to

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the God of heaven and earth, for giving us the knowledge we already possess of his being and perfections, rather than to outstep the bounds of real modesty, by rejecting him altogether from our minds, because we are not permitted to enter the hallowed sanctuary of his ineffable nature, and to touch, and handle, as it were, all the radiant glories contained within its sacred recesses.

From this description of the nature and attributes of God we infer the impropriety of ascribing to him any shape of a bodily kind. Whatever being is possessed of a particular form must unavoidably be limited. But no limits can be fixed to the divine perfections. These are necessarily infinite. He, therefore, can have no form whatever. There is nothing that can resemble him. He infinitely surpasses every other object, whether animate or inanimate, whether on earth, or in heaven. It is unbecoming the reverence which rational beings owe him, to liken him to any object of a corporeal nature; and the arts of sculpture and, painting venture far beyond their proper bounds, when they presume to exhibit the great Eternal under a bodily form; since thereby they not only degrade the majesty of the divine nature, but make wrong impressions upon the minds of the beholders.

These sentiments are confirmed by authority of scripture. The Jews are forbidden to make unto themselves *the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the waters under the earth**. The apostle Paul tells the Athenians, that *God, who made the world, and all things therein, who is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; and that we ought*

* Exodus xx. 4.

not to think him to be like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device†: which authorities as well as the conclusions of our own understandings, are a convincing proof of the truth of the observations, which have been made upon this head.

Yet we read in scripture of the hand, the arm, the ear, the eye, and the mouth of the Deity; but these are only modes of speech, accommodated to our imperfect faculties; which, in treating upon so sublime a subject, are obliged to make use of commonly received language, to express our sentiments respecting it with greater precision and energy. We should recollect, that it was formerly, as it continues to be, the custom of eastern nations, to express themselves in bold metaphors and a glowing diction; and that the Jewish prophets, from whom these examples are taken, wrote in the same style, and scrupled not to seize any images, fitted for conveying their ideas in the most striking, as well as the clearest manner. These visible and corporeal representations of the supreme Being, therefore, are in themselves perfectly innocent, and can be attended with no bad consequences, provided we carry along with us the foregoing observations, whenever we read the scriptures.

It is upon the same principles, that the Deity is represented in the sacred writings as having passions and affections, similar to those which belong to human nature; as moved to anger, jealousy, and pity; as feeling sentiments of affection, tenderness, and joy; and even as relenting of the purposes he had formed. But it would be wrong to suppose, that God is at any time actuated by such

† *Acts xvii. 24. 29.*

affections and passions ; which, though implanted in the human breast for the wisest and best ends, can answer no purpose in the infinite and all perfect mind. In man they serve as springs of action : but the great Jehovah needs no impulses of this kind to lead him to exert his omnipotent energies. He is ever completely happy in himself ; ever communicating happiness to numberless myriads of creatures, which were formed by his power ; and are dependant upon his bounty. Such representations of the Godhead, therefore, we should separate from our considerations, when we wish to form just sentiments respecting him. For though he will mercifully pardon such descriptions of his incomprehensible nature, because owing to the limited capacities of the human mind, and the unavoidable defects of language, yet he will be best pleased with our meditations, when we think of him as absolutely free from every appendage and incumbrance of this kind ; and as possessing those sublime and engaging attributes only, which essentially and truly belong to him.

We may also infer, that since God is infinite in all perfections, we should regard him as One distinct Being ; as *the High and Holy One, who inhabiteth eternity**. The Omnipotent can have no equal or partner in his glories. There cannot possibly be two infinite Beings ; for heaven and earth, and universal space can contain but one such Being. It is impossible, therefore, that another should exist ; much more, a third.

These remarks tend to shew the fallacy of those sentiments held by that part of the Christian world termed Trinitarian ; and we may venture to say, that no one can

* Isaiah lvii. 15.

entertain them without introducing confusion and perplexity into his notions of the Supreme Being ; whom reason and scripture concur in declaring to be a single, undivided essence or spirit. But if, agreeably to the Trinitarian system, the Son and the Holy Spirit be equal to the Father, according to the usual mode of calculation, there must be three equals ; consequently three Infinites ; which, for the reasons above stated, is a direct absurdity.

So jealous, therefore, should we be of the honour of God, that we ought not to permit any other being to share it with him in an equal degree ; not even him, who *is in the bosom*,* that is, *in the counsels of the Father*. We are indeed commanded *to honour the Son as we honour the Father* :† We are also commanded *to be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect*.‡ But as the latter signifies, that we should endeavour to be perfect according to our nature and ability, so the former implies no more, than that we should pay such a degree of respect to the Son of God, as is due to his character and office as a divine messenger. If we examine the conduct of Paul, when preaching the doctrine of a Godhead before the Athenians, we shall find that he did not introduce a second or third person to participate the glories of the divine nature. He said nothing respecting a trinity, that corruption of the pure faith, which originated in a latter period of the christian church, and with which, from this silence on the point, it appears he was wholly unacquainted.

Paul preached the unity of God, a future judgement, and the resurrection of the dead. The Athenians, however, appear not to have been greatly captivated by his

* John i. 18. † John v. 23. ‡ Matt. v. 48.

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doctrines. Some laughed at them: others promised to hear him again: and but few were converted. Yet is it not probable, that the doctrine of a trinity, if it had been then in existence, and had been fairly proposed to this curious and inquisitive people, this race of men reputed to be so fond of telling or of hearing some new thing* might have arrested their attention, and excited their speculations? And is it likely that the apostle, intimately acquainted as he was with human nature, would have neglected so good an opportunity of making it known to them, if he were really commissioned to preach so mysterious a doctrine? His silence on this head leads us to conclude, that it is not an article of scripture, but a doctrine of human invention; a defilement of the clear fountain of christianity by the turbid streams of *science*, *falsly so called*; † and, as such, undeserving a place in the creeds of those, who are anxious to entertain such religious sentiments only, as are consistent with sound sense and reason.

With regard to the importance of just notions respecting the Deity, we shall soon find, by considering the present state of man, of what unspeakable moment they are to his happiness.

If we acknowledge the propriety of religious worship, we must allow, that it ought to be performed in the most becoming manner. It is evident, that the real degree of reverence, which we pay to God, will depend upon the purity, justness, and sublimity of our sentiments respecting him. If these are rational and exalted, our homage, if sincere, will be the same; and will possess that fervor

* Acts xvii. 21.

† 1 Tim vi. 20.

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and animation which ought to quicken all the powers of the mind, whenever we worship God ; which ought to rouze every pious feeling ; and raise us, as it were, " from earth to heaven." But if we do not regard God, as possessed of every possible excellence, and as infinitely superior to every other being, how can we reverence him as such ? If we do not look up to him as infinitely powerful, unboundedly good, and impartially just and holy, how can we render him supreme reverence, warm affection, or filial obedience ? A sincere christain when he kneels in his presence, with his heart impressed with becoming sentiments respecting the Godhead, enjoys a tranquil satisfaction and a refined pleasure which cannot be described. But without such sentiments, whatever may be his feelings, they can be ascribed only to ignorance or enthusiasm, against which every rational worshipper should be at all times upon his guard. Recollect the religious services which the heathens paid their gods. How irrational and debasing ! Yet these services accorded with the ideas they entertained of them ; and were such as they imagined would be most acceptable to them.

Moreover, not only the fervor of our devotions, but likewise their frequency will depend much upon our ideas respecting their object. We the oftner associate with a friend, the more we respect and love him. The more highly we think of him, the more assiduous we are in seeking his company. But we generally avoid all intercourse with those, whose dispositions and manners are not agreeable to our own. It is the same with regard to religious exercises. The more exalted our sentiments respecting the Godhead are, the more shall we be inclined to hold devout intercourse with him ; the more joyfully

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shall we enter his presence ; the more freely open our hearts before him. But if we think unworthily of him, if we behold him in an unamiable light, and conceive of him as implacable, and revengeful, our steps into his sanctuary will be slow and reluctant. Our tongues will falter. Our hearts will be frozen with horror ; and our addresses will be those of slaves to a tyrant, not of children to a beloved parent. Dreadful and unhappy state, when a rational mind is thus affected ! Better were it to be utterly ignorant of God, than to know him only under this character !

Just sentiments respecting the Deity are of great importance also in a moral view. God is the object not only of reverence, but of imitation. Since man, therefore, is the creature of habit, and his mind bears a striking affinity to the objects he most frequently contemplates, it must be of the utmost moment that he entertain just notions of the divine nature. If we regard God as possessing invariable rectitude, unspotted purity, and unbounded benevolence, the habitual contemplation of these attributes will necessarily form us to a love and veneration of them ; the influence of which will not fail to appear in our disposition and conduct ; in the same manner as these are, in a certain degree, affected by the good or bad company we keep in our intercourse with mankind. But if, on the other hand, our notions of God be mean and unworthy of him, if we look upon him as passionate, revengeful, unjust, and cruel, and consider not mercy and benevolence as the most distinguished attributes in his nature, we shall not only worship him with far less pleasure, but our minds will unavoidably receive a strong tincture from such views of his character. We shall hence become morose and gloomy ;

and our tempers will want those amiable and engaging features, which are by no means inconsistent with the strictest holiness and purity of mind, and without which good qualities are neither half so pleasing or valuable.

Proper sentiments respecting the Deity are of great use also in banishing from our minds all superstitious fears, and giving just apprehensions of the measures of the divine government. False notions of the Supreme Being are the very source whence superstition springs. This disease of the mind (as it may not improperly be called) originates in partial views of the dispensations of providence, which it regards as directed by fickleness and caprice, and not by rules of unchangeable wisdom, rectitude, and benevolence. But such as think justly of the Deity, and have enlarged views of his attributes, never experience those painful forebodings and alarms, which agitate the breasts of persons inclined to superstition. The former are calm and satisfied; the latter troubled and afraid. The former contemplate a God of boundless love: the latter tremble at the idea of a God of terror.

To a want of right notions of the Deity we may ascribe the superstitious state of the heathen world; their scrupulous attention to dreams, the flight of birds, the appearance of reptiles, and other ridiculous and ominous appearances, which held their minds in a state of the most abject bondage. But upon those who enjoy the benefit of Christian principles, and can view the Deity in a just light, superstition should have no influence. All the divine dispensations, both in the natural and moral world, we should regard as founded in perfect wisdom, and proceeding from infinite goodness. Whether his thunder shakes the mountains, or his meteors enlighten the horizon; whether,

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for a season, he hides from our sight the splendid luminary of day, or by his awful decree buries populous cities in the dust, we should contemplate him, even in such dispensations, as having some wise and gracious end in view. Amidst affliction and adversity, under the pressure of the severest trials which can befall humanity, just sentiments with regard to God's moral government, will render them comparatively light, will inspire patience and fortitude, and enable us to view them as having a most benevolent tendency.

The book of nature and the volume of revelation are the two grand sources, by which we can come at this most valuable knowledge, to which our attention has now been directed. The world, which we inhabit, presents a magnificent display of the perfections of God; for it is the workmanship of his hand; and every object in it, from the least to the greatest, bears upon it marks of the Divinity. We behold in it the most astonishing instances of power, wisdom, and goodness, so combined, as to engage the admiration of every rational mind, and to inspire devotion and reverence. To use the words of a celebrated writer; "The creation speaketh an universal language, independently of human speech or human language, multiplied and various as they be. It is an ever-existing original, which every man can read. It cannot be forged; it cannot be counterfeited: it cannot be lost: it cannot be altered*: it cannot be suppressed. It does not depend upon the will of man whether it shall be published or not:

* The system of nature can be altered by that omnipotent Being only, who first established it.

it publishes itself from one end of the earth to the other. It preaches to all nations and to all worlds*."

If we are anxious, therefore, to know God, let us contemplate his power in the production of this terrestrial world; in the vast and unfathomable ocean, the lofty and stupendous mountain, the radiant orb of day, and that boundless system of planets and suns which the eye of philosophy descries in the realms of infinite space. Let us contemplate the wisdom and regularity of the laws, by which the various phenomena in the natural world are directed. Let us view his never-ceasing goodness in the different seasons of the year, and diversity of their productions; the constant revolution of day and night; the innumerable tribes of animals, which people the surface of the earth; and all that richly decorated scenery, which the face of nature exhibits, and refer what we behold to the First and Great Cause, and we cannot fail to have our minds deeply impressed with the most exalted ideas of him.

O then, my brethren, let us animate our devotion by thus studying the Creator in his works. How pleasing, how delightful the employment! How great the recompence it will confer! How easy also the task to all who have the power of sight or the faculty of reason! How deliciously will it occupy every vacant moment! We may engage in it when we walk abroad, or when we lie down upon our beds. We may enter upon it with the rising sun, and continue it till his setting beams.

Let no one, therefore, who wishes to know the Almighty, be insensible to his perfections, manifested in the

* Paine's Age of Reason, p. 66. Ed. New York.

world around us. Fanatics, if they please, may condemn such helps to devotion ; and describe the present world as a state of misery, or an abode of degradation and punishment. But the rational Christian beholds in it such innumerable marks, not only of boundless power, but of unerring wisdom, and transcendent goodness, as cannot fail to expand and elevate his devotion ; and improve, not not only his understanding, but his heart.

By thus contemplating the Deity in his works, we shall soon be convinced, that they could not possibly be the production of any created being ; much less of man ; and still less of *gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.* We shall also be satisfied, from this rational survey of the wonders of nature, of the futility of that wisdom, which asserts, *There is no God** ; and maintains, that every thing is the result of blind, unmeaning chance ; ideas, which may be ascribed to a disordered state of the mind, rather than the just conclusions of a well regulated understanding.

The other source, whence just ideas of the Deity may be derived, is from the scriptures. Contrary to the opinion of the writer above alluded to, we maintain, that the creation is not the only word of God with which we are acquainted ; and that it does not “ reveal to man all that it is necessary for a man to know of God.” We assert, that though the book of nature and scripture united are amply sufficient to this end, the former of itself is not so. In proof of this we appeal to history ; and would ask, what was the state of the heathen world as to the knowledge of the One God ? Were not mankind, at this time, sunk

* Psalm xiv. 1.

† Paine's Age of Reason, p. 66.

into the grossest idolatry? Did they not worship an innumerable multitude of fancied deities. Were not even the philosophers almost as ignorant as the vulgar with respect to this important truth? Look at the Athenians. They were highly eminent for attainments in philosophy, and skill in every branch of knowledge; more so than any other nation, at that period, upon the face of the earth. Yet what people were ever more addicted to polytheism? Was not their proneness to it so great as to have an altar erected to "*an unknown god**?" We shall err, therefore, if we depend solely upon nature for information upon this interesting subject. The scriptures will be found our best and safest guide. These contain the most proper and striking descriptions of the nature and attributes of the First Cause. In various places of the historic books of the Old Testament, in the book of Job, in the glowing and devotional compositions of David, in the sublime writings of the Jewish prophets, and in repeated passages of the New Testament, the Supreme Being is described in all that majesty and grandeur, which so exalted a subject demands. Let us, therefore, pay a proper attention to these invaluable writings, and exalt our ideas of God by a diligent perusal of them. If we are not qualified to read them in the languages, in which they were originally written, (which is far from being necessary to the purposes of moral improvement), and wish to behold their beauties in as just and clear a light as possible, we shall act wisely in availing ourselves of those new and amended English versions of the scriptures, which learned and ingenuous men have lately presented to the Christian

* *Acts xvii. 23.*

world* ; to which truth is highly indebted, and which, it may be expected, will have the happiest influence in removing error, and solving difficulties, which, without them, would to some have appeared insurmountable†.

If the sentiments respecting the divine Being, advanced upon this occasion, be just, is it not our duty to urge those of our Christian brethren, who hold Trinitarian doctrines, seriously to consider upon what ground they stand. We will be bold to say, that neither reason, nor scripture, if properly understood, will enable them to maintain it ; and apprehend that the apostle Paul, were he to revisit the Christian church, would say to many of its members ; “ Sirs, I perceive ye have strayed from the pure doctrine of Jesus ; and somewhat resemble those who think that *the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.*”

In advancing these sentiments, let it be observed, that we condemn not men, but opinions. We are the more earnest also in our exhortations to this effect, in order that one of the greatest stumbling blocks to unbelievers may be removed. It is a general complaint that infidelity is daily

* We refer here to the Translations of the New Testament, by Dr. Doddridge, in 2 vol. 12mo, and by Mr. Wakefield ; and to the New Version of Exodus, by Mr. Hopkins ; of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, by Mr. Hodgson ; of Isaiah, by Bp. Lowth, and by Mr. Dodson ; of Jeremiah and the Lamentations, by Dr. Blayney ; of Ezekiel and the Minor Prophets, by Dr. Newcome, the present Archbishop of Armagh ; nor to mention the particular parts of the New Testament, by Ep. Pearce, Dr. Macknight, and Dr. Campbell.

† We have suggested this hint, not with a view of absolutely setting aside our present English translation of the Bible, which, though in various respects excellent, yet has many defects, which undoubtedly will not strike those who read it with blind admiration, but cannot fail to appear conspicuous to such as peruse it with proper care and discernment.

becoming more prevalent; and we have reason to think, that it cannot be ascribed merely to an ignorance of scriptural knowledge, but that the Trinitarian tenets, with other corruptions of religion, which sceptical persons will not take the pains of distinguishing from christianity itself, are, in a great degree, the cause of it.

This state of things, however, should not discourage us, my friends, as a religious society, from continuing our laudable exertions in promoting the knowledge of pure religion, and the practice of virtue; but should rather animate our endeavours in so useful, and so glorious a cause. The progress of infidelity is but for a season. The christian leaven will gradually diffuse itself throughout the whole human mass*. The seed which has been sown, however diminutive, will at length become a tree, and extending its mighty branches over the whole earth, afford a place of refuge to the fowls of heaven. The existence of infidelity, we may venture to predict, will be highly serviceable to the cause of religion. It will establish its evidences upon better grounds: and as the skilful physician expels one poison from the human body by means of another, so the poison of infidelity may be the instrument in God's hand of extirpating the corruptions of christianity. An illustrious proof of this has lately been exhibited in a neighbouring nation†; and we shall have no reason to grieve, if we be hold, in other parts of the world, similar effects, arising from a similar cause.

* See a very sensible discourse upon this subject delivered at Taunton, Sept. 3, 1793, before the Society of Unitarian Christians, established in the West of England, &c. &c. by the Rev. T. Kenrick.

† The ecclesiastical establishment in France, but *not the Christian religion* (as some have falsely asserted) has been completely destroyed. As long as the *New Testament* exists, religion cannot be destroyed.

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While infidelity is thus destroying the ramparts which Antichrist has erected in the Messiah's kingdom, we have only to take care, that it make no inroads upon the citadel of christianity; and though, in its progress, it may overturn some of the pretended bulwarks which the friends of religion have incautiously erected upon the frontiers of the Christian territories, let us, in the mean time, by the force of argument, storm its strong holds, and lay the axe to the very root of its power.

Though hostile to our principles, yet in the eye of charity, we embrace the partizans of unbelief as brethren. When they have exhausted their strength, we will gladly receive them into the pale of the pure faith. We will run out to meet them. Yea, we will kill for them the fatted calf, and make merry on their return.

I shall trespass upon the patience of my hearers, only while I touch upon another point; which, though already ably recommended to you*, ought never, upon these occasions, to be entirely omitted. Since we profess religious principles, (as *we* think) in many respects more genuine than others of our fellow Christians, let us manifest their efficacy in producing in us a greater purity and rectitude of manners. On this, more than upon any thing besides, will depend the success of our cause. Let us, therefore, be particularly attentive to the duties of public and private devotion; to the observance of the Lord's Supper; and to the instruction of the rising generation. Let our conduct more visibly refute the unfounded objection which

* In a sermon preached at Exeter, July 2d, 1794, before the Society of Unitarian Christians, established in the West of England, &c. &c. by the Rev. J. Reynel.

has been made to us, as a religious body, that in proportion as we profess to be more enlightened, we become more indifferent to devotional exercises.

With regard to our conduct as members of civil society, let us live quiet and peaceable lives, doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly before God. Yet, jealous for the honour of religion, let us raise our voices against any application of it to improper purposes*; and though christianity

* "But what fills up, in my opinion, the measure of our impieties, and leaves them incapable of aggravation, is, *the proclamation for a solemn fast*; to implore, truly, the assistance of the Almighty in destroying his own image, and desolating his own creation! No energies of language, that I have in store, can delineate my sense of this enormity, this sacrilegious profanation of religion. I am constrained to refer the conception of it to *expressive silence* and secret feeling." Wakefield's Spirit of Christianity compared with the Spirit of the Times.

Near akin to this odious abuse of religion is the ceremony of consecrating colours, of late so prevalent in this kingdom—a solemn mockery! and one of the many mysteries of priestcraft which still remain to be extirpated from among us!

Listen also, gentle reader, (if thy patience will enable thee to do it) to the following extract from a declaration of the present *humane and pious* Empress of Russia, read in the cathedral of Petersburg, relative to the affairs of Poland: "Thus has the insurrection been quelled in Poland: thus have the snares of the traitors been destroyed. Acknowledging, therefore, the divine favours, which have crowned all the enterprizes and acts of her Imperial Majesty, without interruption, during a reign of 33 years, may all her faithful subjects return due thanks to the Almighty, and offer up their most fervent prayers, that the Almighty may grant his most holy aid, in the complete termination of this affair, to the benefit and glory of the empire, and to the establishment of the lasting tranquillity and safety of her frontiers in times to come."

N. B. The moment this declaration was read, the *Te Deum* was chaunted, under a discharge of 201 pieces of cannon from the citadel and

and

ianity was established by the blood of the Messiah, let us not imagine, that its cause can at any time be promoted by the shedding of human blood.

Be peace, therefore, at all times, the object of our wishes; and reason the sole weapon of our warfare. In the course of our religious labours, let us never be discouraged by misrepresentation, depressed by calumny, nor overcome by difficulties the most formidable. The cause, in which we are embarked, is truly glorious. The smiles of Providence will not fail to attend us: and, if we nobly persevere, we shall at length arrive in safety at the wished-for shore, where our exertions will be crowned with complete success; where the purest joys will animate our bosoms, and the blessing of heaven descend upon our heads.

the admiralty. The *clergy* then congratulated the Empress, who sat down to a banquet of 36 covers; and drinking the health of her generals, field-marshals, &c. another salute of 51 pieces of cannon was fired. *Star*, January 10, 1795.

F I N I S.

Published by the same Author,

Obedience to God, rather than Men, recommended in a
Sermon, preached at Taunton, on February the 22d,
1795; being the Sunday before the late Fast Day.
Sold by Noon, Ilminster; Johnson, St. Paul's Church
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